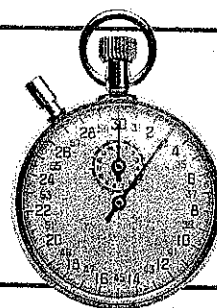


THE  
*T*HREE-MINUTE  
CLASSROOM  
WALK-THROUGH



CHANGING SCHOOL  
SUPERVISORY PRACTICE  
ONE TEACHER AT A TIME

CAROLYN J. DOWNEY

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# Conducting the Walk-Through Observation

## *A Five-Step Process*

**W**e now present the five-step process in detail. When these steps are in place, they provide a focus for the observer. The structure allows an individual to be in the classroom for a short period of time and gain much information that may be used later to facilitate teachers' reflections about their decisions. Multiple observations of the same teacher over time enhance the power of the observations to provide the maximum information in the compressed time capsules available to busy school administrators and supervisors during any given week in the school year.

Before the five steps are presented, take a moment to think about what you do when you conduct walk-throughs in classrooms. Then you will be able to compare what you do with what we do. These questions might start you on your reflective thoughts:

- What do you pay attention to first?
- What do you do, for example, walk around, look at student work, talk with students, talk to the teacher?
- What do you observe?
- What do you do with the data you gather?

<p style="text-align: center;">REFLECTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">My Walk-Throughs</p> <p>(Write your comments here.)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Read through the walk-through outline of a classroom visit that follows. We have chosen to introduce the model in this way because it provides you with a specific example of what you might see in a classroom. If you have gone through the Downey Walk-Through training, you will recognize that this format is similar to how we introduce the model utilizing videotapes of classroom teaching. If you have a videotape of a teaching episode, you may want to use it for this exercise. The scenarios in this chapter show you the kind of notations we would make and how we would use what we learned during the classroom observation to engage the teacher in a reflective conversation. (Note: While we make suggestions about reflective dialogue based on the scenarios included here, in reality you would not want to engage a teacher in reflective dialogue based on only a single visit to the classroom.)

The following classroom scenario is set in a 12th-grade language arts class. This actual observation took 3 minutes.

### Scenario One: 12th-Grade Language Arts

[Students all looking at the teacher. Teacher at the board. On the board the words *iambic* and *anapestic*. Teacher is pointing to the word *iambic*.]

Teacher:                      How many syllables does it need to have?

Choral response:          Six. [About half the students.]

- Teacher: And you have to say this in your head: iambic pentameter. One of the things we mix this up with is "anapestic." I need someone to come to the board and write three anapestic feet. [Five students raise their hands.] Virginia.
- Virginia: [Student goes to the board and illustrates symbolically three anapestic feet and then walks back to her desk.]
- Teacher: Thank you. What is the critical difference between an iambic and anapestic foot? [A few students raise their hands.] If you know, raise your hand with an open hand. If you know but don't want to be called on, raise your hand with a closed hand. If you don't know, raise your hand and cup your hand [to tell me] "I don't know what the difference is and I am confused." [All students raise their hands, most with an open hand.] John.
- John: Anapestic has three and iambic has two.
- Teacher: Yes, not words but . . .
- Choral student response: Syllables. [Almost all students.]
- Teacher: That's right. Not words but syllables. And, that is confusing. What is the next critical thing? [Eight students raise their hands.] Susan.
- Susan: Anapestic has two unstressed.
- Teacher: Two unstressed and one . . .?
- Choral student response: Stressed. [Almost all students.]
- Teacher: How many total syllables?
- Choral student response: Nine. [Almost all students.]
- Teacher: This was so easy on the board. When we clap it seems easy, too; but when we write it, it is harder. Let's practice this clapping. Clap on 3, three anapestic feet. 1, 2, 3.
- Student clapping: [All students clapping, about two or three students clapping incorrectly.]

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- Teacher: Good. Clap on 3, two iambic and three anapestic feet. 1, 2, 3.
- Student clapping: [All students clapping, about three or four students clapping incorrectly.]
- Teacher: Clap on 3, one anapestic, one iambic, one anapestic, one iambic. [Small groan from class with smiles.] 1, 2, 3.
- Student clapping: [All students clapping, about six students clapping incorrectly.]
- Teacher: Very good. I know those of you who didn't quite get it will practice it. Let's now look at some literature and see if we can distinguish between the two types of sonnets.
- 

Using the space provided, write down what you observed and what follow-up comments you might give to the teacher, if desired.

### My Observations and Possible Follow-Up Areas for the Language Arts Classroom

(Write your comments here.)

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## THE FIVE-STEP OBSERVATION STRUCTURE

The goal of our walk-through approach is to gather focused data in a very short period of time. During most observations we have one area that we wish to see—students oriented to the work. Other than that, and very important, we look for both the curricular and instructional

**Table 2.1** Quick Overview of the Five-Step Walk-Through Observation Structure

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<b>Step 1: Student Orientation to the Work</b>	—Do students appear to be attending when you first walk into the room?
<b>Step 2: Curricular Decision Points</b>	—What objective(s) has the teacher chosen to teach at this time and how aligned are they to the prescribed (district or state) written curriculum?
<b>Step 3: Instructional Decision Points</b>	—What instructional practices is the teacher choosing to use at this time to help students achieve the learning of the curriculum objectives?
<b>Step 4: “Walk-the-Walls”: Curricular and Instructional Decisions</b>	—What evidence is there of past objectives taught and/or instructional decisions used to teach the objectives that are present in the classroom—walk-the-walls, portfolios, projects in the room?
<b>Step 5: Safety and Health Issues</b>	—Are there any noticeable safety or health issues that need to be addressed?

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decisions the teacher is choosing to make. We make no judgment about the teacher’s practices. Table 2.1 is a quick preview of our five steps. Always do the first three steps and pick up Steps 4 and 5 based on time and observation.

Each step of the five-step process is described in detail below and is used to analyze the same scenario you just observed.

## STEP 1: STUDENT ORIENTATION TO WORK

The first step is completed within the first two seconds (hopefully before we are noticed by the students). The goal of this step is to notice whether *students appear to be oriented to the work*. The work could be listening and interacting with the teacher, with other students, or working alone. We are not concerned with the nature of the student work or what the teacher is doing to keep students engaged. This is just a quick look to see if attending behavior seems to be in place. Attending behavior is a prerequisite to learning.

We do not count the number of students engaged. This step is just a *cur-sory glance*. If, however, we see nonattending behavior on numerous visits, we need to be observant as to what might be creating the off-task behavior.

The best time to gather this information is before the students see you. If there are windows in the room, you might gather this information before entering. If the door is open or opens without squeaking, you may

be able to quickly ascertain attending behavior. If the door squeaks and students notice you, try not to make eye contact with students or engage the students so that the teacher may continue business as usual. If you cause a distraction but the students go back to task quickly or the teacher brings their focus back to the work, this is fine. You want to be as unobtrusive as possible in Step 1 of your observation.

Blase and Blase (1998) indicate that teachers like to have administrators in their rooms, but not when they distract students from their work. *Be careful that you do not take students off task.* At times you may desire to engage in conversation with students, but make sure that it is not simply to meet your observational needs. When you walk into the room, remember that your primary client is the teacher. You must try not be distracted by student behavior; students are experts at knowing how to engage visitors so that they do not have to do their work.

Often the physical setup of the room will cause you to be a distraction. If the door places you at the front of the room, quickly walk to the back of the room. Another distraction may occur if the teacher stops to talk with you. You must clarify for teachers that they are to ignore you and carry on with their work whenever you walk into the room, unless you specifically ask for their attention. Many teachers believe that administrators are to be acknowledged and honored when they come into the room. You probably will have to talk one-on-one with these teachers to help them refrain from this practice. You cannot observe teachers who are engaged with the observers.

Frequently the teacher will begin to explain what the students are learning or have a student come and share what the students are learning. This would be informative for visitors, but you are not a visitor. You are part of the learning environment. Because some habits are hard to break, be persistent with teachers on this point.

Downey relates the story of walking around a high school with a principal: In every classroom entered, the teacher stopped what he or she was doing and informed them of what the students were learning at that moment. After about a dozen classrooms, Downey asked the principal about this behavior. The principal explained that it was the teachers' practice and stated that she had, on several occasions, asked the teachers to not do this. When questioned further about why she thought they were continuing to stop teaching when the principal entered their rooms, she indicated that it was mainly so they would not be observed. Downey pressed the principal on this point, asking if it just might be a habit. The principal said she did not think so, because she had tried so hard to implement this change. They went on to discuss strategies to help teachers be comfortable with the principal coming into the classrooms to observe.



Step 1 should be very brief, and its only purpose is to notice if students are instructionally oriented. However, we cannot really know if they are paying attention. This is why we do not use it to assess an “engagement rate.” At times students appear to be paying attention but really are not. This becomes evident if a student is asked a question about the content and cannot respond, or if asked to follow along when the teacher is reading and he or she is on the wrong page. We are not concerned with these instances since our interest is in getting a cursory measure of the degree of orientation of the students to the work. This is mainly a classroom management issue. If there is frequent off-task behavior by many students, direct action should be taken to assist the teacher in developing classroom management skills.

### **Analysis of the Language Arts Scenario for Step 1:**

The box below includes the information you might have recorded for Step 1.

<p><b>Box 2.1      Language Arts Scenario—Step 1: Student Orientation to the Work</b></p> <hr/> <p>Fine. Students oriented to teacher.</p>
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## **STEP 2: CURRICULAR DECISION POINTS**

After the very quick Step 1, we spend the majority of the two to three minutes in the classroom delineating the actual curricular objective(s) we see being taught. We want to determine the content of the student learning.

*Content* is the skill, knowledge, process, or concept to be learned by the students. Identifying the curricular objective is the first part of Step 2. Most of us tend to focus immediately on the instructional practices in our observations rather than on the curriculum standards and objectives being taught. We become absorbed in the instructional decisions a teacher is making and miss the curricular objectives being taught.

The basic purpose of Step 2 is to determine the alignment of the taught curriculum with the written or prescribed curriculum (English, 1993). In order to make a determination, we must derive the curriculum content and then ascertain where the objective falls in the district (or state) curriculum.

**Table 2.2** Example of Scope and Sequence Chart for Calibration Purposes

<i>Kindergarten</i>		<i>Grade One</i>		<i>Grade Two</i>	
<i>Number Sense</i>		<i>Number Sense</i>		<i>Number Sense</i>	
K.1	Count, recognize, represent, name, and order a number of objects (up to 30).	1.1	Count, read, and write whole numbers to 100.	2.1	Count, read, and write whole numbers to 1,000 and identify the place value for each digit.
K.2	Compare two or more sets of objects (up to 10 objects in each group) and identify which set is equal to, more than, or less than the other.	1.2	Compare and order whole numbers to 100 by using the symbols for less than, equal to, or greater than (<, =, >).	2.2	Use words, models, and expanded forms (e.g., $45 = 4 \text{ tens} + 5$ ) to represent numbers (up to 1,000).
				2.3	Order and compare whole numbers to 1,000 by using the symbols <, =, >.

At some point, either while in the classroom or after returning to the office or other place where the curriculum can be accessed online, we examine curriculum documents to determine whether and where the objectives are located in the prescribed, written curriculum. Many districts develop a scope and sequence of the content across grades and courses for their school-based administrators and teacher coaches. The hard copy of this document is organized to be easily read, light in weight, and laminated for carrying purposes. Some principals have downloaded the scope and sequence charts into their electronic organizers. An example of how this might look can be found above in Table 2.2.

To calibrate the lessons, locate the objective being taught in the district's (or state's) prescribed, written curriculum. Downey has worked with several districts to set up an easy way to review the curriculum objectives on the spot. Objectives listed in table format by course or grade are very helpful tools for review, especially if they are computerized.

It is important that your calibration be descriptive only. You should not speculate as to why the teacher has chosen one objective over another. Even though we may find the objective to be below or above the grade observed, the teacher may have good reason for this.

Data from thousands of observations made over the past few years portray a discouraging general trend. The more a student moves up the

grade levels, the less likely it is that the observed objective will be on grade level. Rather, it will typically be below grade level. This trend is found in schools serving children from all socioeconomic levels, and it definitely holds true in those schools identified as low performing.

Another interesting but perplexing and disturbing observation made over the years is that even district-adopted textbooks use objectives that are below grade level. And most teachers let the textbooks rather than the written curriculum direct what they are teaching. This certainly is an area in which staff development is needed across the nation.

What should be done when you find a teacher teaching below grade level? Do you judge this as wrong? Absolutely not—this is not about judgment. There are many instructional reasons why a teacher might choose to be teaching a particular objective. The calibration simply allows administrators to see patterns in the teachers' curricular decisions. It also may begin to throw light on the instructional decisions a teacher might be making. For example, you may have walked in when the teacher was reviewing or bringing forward prior learning to aid in teaching a new concept. Or, it could be that through diagnostic assessments the teacher had determined that the students did not have the prerequisite knowledge for the desired on-grade level or course level learning outcomes. All of this information helps principals when they confer with staff about their curricular and instructional decisions. It also provides the principal with data for potential reflective questions, which are described in detail in Chapter 3.

What happens if you find several objectives being worked on at the same time when you walk into a classroom? Don't try to note all of them. If you do, you might find yourself in the room for 15 minutes. Observe the teacher and note only the objective with which the teacher is directly involved. It might be whole-group work, small-group work, or the teacher working one-on-one with a student. If there is another teacher or aide in the classroom, also determine the objective that adult is working with before you leave. *Try to identify no more than two or three objectives when multiple activities are being conducted.* At times a student might be working with many different worksheets. Just pick the specific objective on which the student is currently working, then move to another student until you pick up another objective, and then move out of the room.

Typically, you will not get an accurate reading of the objective by standing at the back of the room. Being as unobtrusive as possible, you must view the actual work that students are doing. Go beyond reading the heading of a worksheet. It might not correctly reflect or represent the objective or give you all the information you need.

Try not to talk with students if it takes them off task. However, if you think that asking a few students what they are learning will help

determine the objective, without being too disruptive, you might talk with a student for just a few seconds. Ask the question, “What are you learning?” not “What are you doing?” With the latter, students will typically describe the activity rather than the learning. Repeat the question to determine the objective and make sure to ask more than one student—you might find different answers.

## Analysis of the Language Arts Scenario for Step 2

The box below includes information you might have recorded for the first part of Step 2.

### Box 2.2 Language Arts Scenario—Step 2: Curriculum Decision Points

**Content Taught:** Distinguish between an iambic and anapestic foot (syllables and stress) that might be used in a sonnet.

**Course:** 12th-grade English

**District Calibration:** Could be a prerequisite objective in the district’s 7th-grade English curriculum course [from a real district’s curriculum scope and sequence: “Use iambic and anapestic feet in writing a sonnet.”].

One might ask why a 12th-grade teacher would be teaching a 7th-grade objective. It could be that it was a prerequisite to a new learning. Or it could be that the objective is on a high-stakes test and the students did not do well on this topic. Later we will ask a reflective question (see Chapter 3) that enables the teacher to reflect on the criteria that should be used to select the objectives to be taught. Again, the purpose of Step 2 is only to gather the data.

Once you are comfortable identifying the content of the objective(s) being taught, you can begin to examine more detailed information about the objective—what Downey and Frase (2001) call *the 3 C’s*—*Content, Context, and Cognitive type*. Table 2.3 outlines the 3 C’s:

The first “C” is “Content” (the objective). The second “C” is “Context.” The context of an objective is very important for what is called “deep alignment” (English & Steffy, 2001). Context, how teachers have students

**Table 2.3** Analysis of the Student Objective(s)—The 3 C's

**Content:** The skill, knowledge, process, concept to be learned by the students

**Context:** The conditions under which students will demonstrate the learning (e.g., student mode of response, materials and information given to them orally or in writing)

**Cognitive Type:** Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation (Bloom et al., 1956)

practice the content of the objective, is essential for helping students transfer the learnings outside of the classroom situation. One critical place we want students to transfer their learning is to external, high-stakes assessments. But, perhaps the most important transfer is to “real-world” situations.

Crucial to the concept of deep alignment is the work of Thorndike (1913, 1951). Thorndike found that transfer of learnings to new situations was easier when the situational contexts were similar. But how do we make the instructional context of classrooms similar to the context where the student must demonstrate what he or she knows on a state accountability assessment? This is accomplished by on some occasions making the pedagogy in the classroom similar to the test format. This is a very simple suggestion but one that is seldom practiced consistently in classrooms.

English and Steffy (2001) discuss topological alignment and deep alignment. They define these terms as follows:

- *Topological Alignment*—A generic “match” between the test curriculum content and classroom content and context aligned with some sequencing considerations
- *Deep Alignment*—Creation of maximum pedagogical and environmental congruence between the teaching and the testing situations in both content and context using many alternative forms of assessment

Typically, the context of an objective involves questions that are oral in nature or, if written, that require short, fill-in answers. The transferability of these responses to other contexts is weak. Teachers need to practice and test students in multiple contexts to aid in their transfer of the learning.

There are at least three elements involved in the context of an objective:

- *Givens*—Material that is given to the student in the form of directions (oral or in writing), and other information such as graphs or a word problem.
- *Nature of the Student Response*—How is the student to respond? By writing, speaking, pointing, circling, or bubbling in?
- *Special Vocabulary*—Any vocabulary that is essential to understanding the particular content of the objective.

The third “C” is the “Cognitive type,” from Bloom, Englehard, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl’s (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain*. It is important to note that in the research conducted by Bloom and others, the levels are not considered hierarchical (see Cezak, Webb, & Kalohn, 1995), but they are useful in our application to describe the desired type of thinking.

### **Analysis of the Language Arts Scenario That Is Part of Step 2**

#### **Box 2.3     Language Arts Scenario—Step 2: Curriculum Decision Points**

**Content Taught:** Distinguish between an iambic and anapestic foot (syllables and stress) that might be used in a sonnet.

**Context of the Taught Content:**

- Given—oral directions to describe differences or to clap
- Nature of the student response—oral, hand clapping
- Special vocabulary—iambic, anapestic, sonnet

**Cognitive Type:** Knowledge

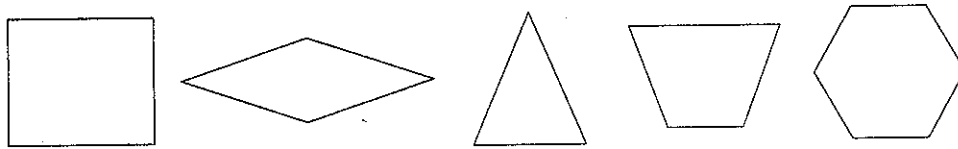
If the information recorded so far was reflective of a trend or pattern based on a number of classroom visits, it could lead to a reflective dialogue with the teacher around a number of topics such as the selection of what is given to the student, the nature of the student response, as well as the thinking approach desired.

**Table 2.4** Florida Sunshine Example

**Think, Solve, and Explain**  
**(Florida "Performance Tasks" Short Answer)**

Draw a circle around each quadrilateral shown below

On the lines below, explain why all the shapes you circled are quadrilaterals.



To further elaborate on the value of noting and reflecting on the context of an objective, we will take a sample item from the Florida practice tests and deconstruct it for content and context.

Read the sample test item in Table 2.4, complete it, and then identify the content and the context. We call this "topological alignment." Please note that there are two different contexts—one in which a student identifies and answers, and the second in which the student explains the answer.

Using the space provided, write down the content, context, and cognitive type of the test item.

**My Deconstruction Analysis of the Florida Test Item**

(Write your comments here.)

Content:

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(Continued)

(Continued)

Context 1:

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Context 2:

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Cognitions Type:

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Our analysis of the test item for content and context follows.

Content: Identify quadrilaterals and explain answer.

Context 1:

- Givens—Five different shapes, three of which are quadrilaterals; written directions for what to do
- Nature of Student Response—Circle the correct figures.
- Special vocabulary: Quadrilaterals



Cognition Type 1: Knowledge  
Context 2:

- Givens—Same as Context 1 with added directions to explain answer; 3 lines on which to write.
- Nature of student response—Written
- Special Vocabulary—Same as Context 1

Cognition Type 2: Comprehension

If we were going to expand for deep alignment, we would do three things:

- Determine the range of content for this test item
- Identify the various types of contexts to which the content would be transferred
- Specify the various types of thinking cognition desired

For more information about how to achieve “deep alignment,” please consult the deep alignment book by English and Steffy (2001). The key is to understand what is meant by “context” and the need for a teacher to use multiple contexts when teaching. In its completeness, Step 2 has three components as shown in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5** Three Components of Step 2

- 
- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1. | Derive the actual objective(s) taught (content, context, and cognitive type).   |
| 2. | Observe for stated or listed objective (it might be on the board, the teacher might say it, it could be in a lesson plan that is open on the desk) and compare that with the observed objective for congruence. |
| 3. | Calibrate the actual objective taught.  |
- 

In the second component of Step 2, we are not saying that the objective must be stated to the students or that it must be written on the board, though these are instructional decisions a teacher might make. The reason for identifying the objective is to compare what the teacher thinks he or she is teaching with what we observe is being taught. That is the extent of our observation. Some principals have misinterpreted this part of the five-step structure and turned it into, “The objective must be on the board.” This is not our message. *Our message is that what the teacher thinks is being taught should be what is actually being taught.* It is about congruence.

## Completed Step 2—Analysis of the Language Arts Lesson

### Box 2.4 Language Arts Scenario—Step 2: Curriculum Decision Points

#### Part I: Actual Taught Objective

##### A. Content Taught:

Distinguish between an iambic and anapestic foot (syllables and stress) that might be used in a sonnet.

##### B. Context of the Taught Content:

- Given—Oral directions to describe differences or to clap
- Nature of the Student Response—Oral, hand clapping
- Special Vocabulary—Iambic, anapestic, sonnet

##### C. Cognitive Type: Knowledge

#### Part II: Listed or Stated Objective

Teacher stated the same objective as the observed objective. It is congruent with the objective actually taught.

#### Part III: Calibration

**Course:** 12th-grade English.

**District Calibration:** Located in the 7th-grade English curriculum course of the district curriculum [from a real district's curriculum scope and sequence: "Use iambic and anapestic feet in writing a sonnet."].

Think about your original analysis of this scenario. Did you even think about the curriculum? Often we find that observers go right for analyzing the instructional practices in their walk-throughs rather than thinking first about the curricular objective being taught. We have spent quite a bit of time describing Step 2 because it is often less practiced than the other steps.

Some of the district and/or state calibrations might be difficult to accomplish if only vague standards and objectives are mentioned, or if some standards are the same across grade levels. We find that principals using this process become advocates for a precise set of objectives by grade or course level, and for a feasible number of student learnings to be undertaken by teachers.

Some principals do “curriculum sweeps” when they first start using the process. They may go into the classroom to observe the objective(s) being taught; do calibrations; and prepare charts for grade level, department staff, and/or total staff review. Many principals/coaches do not try to do all of the 3 C’s (content, context, and cognitive type) when they first work with our walk-through structure. We recommend getting the content down first, and only then moving to context and cognition type.

### STEP 3: INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION POINTS

After we have derived the curriculum, we are ready to look at instructional teaching practices. Instructional practices are those practices a teacher uses to teach the objectives, such as questioning skills, use of non-linguistic representations, grouping strategies, and informal assessment strategies. (When you worked on the first scenario, you probably started your analysis with teacher practices.)

Step 3 consists of the components described in Table 2.6:

**Table 2.6** Step 3 Components

- 
- Determine the generic instructional decisions being made. Generic practices are those that could be used regardless of student age or subject area (e.g., comparing and contrasting, homework use, feedback, using examples, student error, non-linguistic representations, instruction at the right level of difficulty for each student, etc.).
  - Identify strategies being used at a specific school and/or district focus. For instance, if the district has a goal of using reciprocal teaching or cooperative learning, the Marzano (2001) teaching skills, a principal would notice if and how these strategies were being used during the walk-through.
  - Observe specific research-based, subject-specific practices, such as the use of meta-cognitive strategies, manipulatives, or mental computations in mathematics.
- 

With our walk-through structure, it is important not to make judgments about the teaching practices, but rather to simply notice the instructional decisions being made. In reflective inquiry, a teacher is posed a question regarding the criteria he or she considers when selecting one instructional practice over another. Usually, by the time the principal has identified the curriculum objective(s), he or she has seen several instructional decisions and can leave the classroom.

We do not enter classrooms expecting to exit with an area for follow-up each time. In fact, with experienced teachers, we might have a follow-up conversation in the form of a reflective question once every two or three months, even though we are in their classrooms almost weekly. It is in the accumulation of data from multiple, brief visits that we begin to see patterns and identify possible areas for dialogue. In the interim, administrators are building a knowledge base about what students have learned as well as the instructional practices of the school across grades, courses, and teachers.

This process is not like a formal teacher evaluation observation in which administrators are trying to gather complete data and examine numerous instructional practices. At first, teachers will not understand why you are staying for such a short time and will think that you cannot see anything in such a short visit. One reason teachers ask you to stay longer is that they think you are judging their work. Over time they will realize that you are not in a judging mode but are in a coaching mode and that you do not need to examine every aspect of the teacher's teaching.

Recall the Language Arts scenario and what you saw. Did you mainly write down instructional practices?

### **Completed Step 3—Analysis of the Language Arts Lesson**

#### **Box 2.5    Language Arts Scenario—Step 3: Instructional Decision Points**

##### **Part I: Generic Instructional Practices**

- Strategies for dealing with student error
- Approaches for having students let the teacher know their readiness to respond
- Variety of student response modes

##### **Part II: School/District Focus**

In the scenario, we don't know the school focus; none was provided.

##### **Part III: Subject-Specific Instructional Practices**

- Use of real-world experiences

Notice we listed only a few practices. You may have listed others. We do not need to see the same things. We are not judging the teacher's actions. The thoughts triggered in you may be different from another person's. In a real-life situation you will know the teacher, and you will have a better feeling for what might be a valuable area for reflective inquiry.

#### **STEP 4: "WALK THE WALLS"—CURRICULAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS**

You will almost always be able to complete Steps 1 through 3 of our walk-through structure. If you find that you identified the objective quickly and still have a little more time, you might want to look for learnings that have been taught or that might be taught in the future. We call this "walking the walls." You can observe many curricular objectives and instructional practices by noting what is on the wall as well as in other classroom locations.

It is strongly suggested that you do not start with this step, because you could use all your time on it without actually having observed the teaching decisions being rendered. Some principals do curriculum wall-walks after school with the teachers, carrying along the district curriculum objectives electronically or just the scope and sequence objectives in a chart form. Over time you will become accustomed to the walls in your classrooms, since teachers typically change only one of the sections at a time.

Mainly the walls reveal objectives. However, there may be instructional ideas on the walls, too. For instance, there may be procedure steps, such as the listing of the five parts of a descriptive essay and what goes into each paragraph. Or it might be a brainstormed list of synonyms that the students have completed as a class. (Displayed student projects with multiple names attached suggest small-group work.)

One of the interesting things to determine is why student work—celebrations, models, something from each student—is displayed. We have noticed often on our walk-throughs what we call "walls of humiliation." This is when every student's name is prominently posted on the wall with the number of books read, or the number of A's obtained, and so on. Occasionally we see postings of progress or semester grades listed by student I.D. An interesting reflective question for staff might be, "What criteria do you consider when deciding how the walls will be used as an extension of the learning environment?"

Besides the walls, there may be student portfolios or journals that could be reviewed to identify curriculum objectives. Worksheets on the teacher's desk or graded papers in a distribution box are student artifacts that would become part of our walk-the-walls step. Since we have no information relevant to this step in our scenario, we will not present an analysis for Step 4.

## **STEP 5: SAFETY AND HEALTH ISSUES**

Step 5 just happens naturally. As you enter and exit classrooms, you will note particular safety or health issues. This is not a formal inspection or situation for placing blame; it is a time for making helpful observations. Some examples we have encountered include the following:

- Broken thresholds at entryways
- Extension cords and power strips creating a trip hazard
- Backpacks on floors in the aisles
- A student in a wheelchair located in the flow of traffic
- Dim or burned-out lights
- Air conditioning or blowers so loud you cannot hear the teacher
- Inadequate traffic flow because of the placement of tables and chairs
- A coffeemaker in a classroom, close to paper
- Paper and materials positioned precariously on top of tables, file cabinets, or bookshelves
- Lack of adequate ventilation
- Presence of chemical odors
- Paper cutter with a broken spring that allows the blade to fall freely

We are sure you could add to this list. Often we find that there are work orders that have been put on the back shelf that need to be brought forward. Since we have no information from our scenario relevant to this step, no analysis is provided for Step 5.

Now reflect on your approach as compared to our walk-through approach. Using the space provided, write down similarities and differences.

Pre/Post Comparisons Between My Walk-Through Thinking  
and the Five-Step Process Described in This Chapter

Similarities and Differences

(Write your comments here.)

Similarities

Differences

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**How About Trying Out Our Five-Step Process?**

The following is another walk-through observation scenario for you to consider. Read through the 6th-Grade Mathematics scenario and complete Steps 1 through 3 of your analysis on the worksheet.

**Scenario Two: 6th-Grade Mathematics**

[All students are looking at the teacher.]

Teacher: A percent means a part of 100. What is 30/100? [Teacher writes percent on the board.] [Three students raising their hands.] James?

James: 30 percent.

Teacher: Thank you. Any questions so far? [No hands go up.] What if I gave you 20/100? [Teacher writes percent on the board.] [Six students raising their hands.] Sally?

Sally: 20.

Teacher: 20 what?

Sally: 20 percent.

Teacher: Good. What if you have 7 out of 100? [Teacher writes percent on the board.] [Five students raising their hands.] Mark?

Mark: 7 percent.

Teacher: Thank you. What is this all leading to? Think for about 5 seconds. What am I trying to note? What if I had 100/100? [Teacher writes percent on the board.] What would this equal as a percent? [Five students raising their hands.] James?

James: 100 percent.

Teacher: Very good. Remember how ratios are a type of fraction. If I reduced 100/100 what would it be? [Teacher pointing to percent on the board.] [Five students raising their hands.] Mary?

Mary: 1.

Teacher: The whole number one equals 100 percent. If it is less than 100 percent it is a what?

Now it is time for you to do your analysis using the first three steps. Then we will give you our analysis.

Step 1: Student Orientation to the Work: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Step 2: Curriculum Decision Points

**Part I: Actual Observed Taught Curriculum**

A. Content of the taught objective—Skill, knowledge, process, concept to be learned

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. Context of the taught objective—Conditions under which a student demonstrates the content

• Givens: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

• Nature of student response: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



- Vocabulary specific to the content: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Cognitive Type—K, C, Ap, An, S, E \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: Stated or Observed Objective, if Easily Observed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part III: District Calibration** (If you have your district curriculum, use it here.)

Step 3: Instructional Practice Decision Points

**Part I: Generic Practices** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: School/District Focus** (Use your district's or school's focus here.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Part III: Subject Area Practices** \_\_\_\_\_

The following is our analysis:

Step 1: Student Orientation to the Work:

Students oriented toward the teacher

Step 2: Curriculum Decision Points

**Part I: Actual Observed Taught Curriculum**

A. Content of the taught objective—Skill, knowledge, process, concept to be learned

- Convert simple fractions to percentages
- Convert fractions to whole numbers
- Convert whole numbers to percentages

(Continued)

(Continued)

B. Context of the taught objective—Conditions under which a student demonstrates the content

- Givens: Symbolic problems on the board, oral directions
- Nature of student response: Oral
- Vocabulary specific to the content: Ratio, fraction, whole number

C. Cognitive Type—Knowledge

**Part II: Stated or Observed Objective, if Easily Observed**

Nothing observed

**Part III: District Calibration** (If you have your district curriculum, use it here.)

3rd-grade objectives

Step 3: Instructional Practice Decision Points

**Part I: Generic Practices**

- Use of prior learning to transfer to new learnings
- Use of review
- Types of student responses
- Types of questions

**Part II: School/District Focus** (Use your district's or school's focus here.)

Not known

**Part III: Subject Area Practices**

- Metacognition
- Symbolic and real-world examples

A basic caution is in order here. We do not use any worksheet when conducting a walk-through in the classroom. Administrators must remember the components of the five-step process. It may take a few weeks of practice to internalize the steps. Until that time, the administrator may take a few notes, but very few, on a 3 × 5 card. (This technique will be described in detail in Chapter 5.)

## SUMMARY

The flowchart in Table 2.7 is another view of the five-step structure:

**Table 2.7** Five-Step Walk-Through Observation Structure

Curriculum	Instruction
	1. Student Orientation to Work
2. Objective (CCC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taught</li> <li>• Stated or Observed</li> <li>• District Calibration</li> </ul>	
	3. Instructional Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generic</li> <li>• School/District Focus</li> <li>• Subject Specific</li> </ul>
• Walk-the-Walls	
	5. Safety and Health

The major elements discussed in this chapter include the following:

- When conducting the walk-through, the principal is acting as a coach, gathering data about the decisions teachers are making regarding curriculum and instruction.
- We are not looking for strengths and weaknesses. We are not judging.
- We are not looking for areas to reinforce or refine, except with the novice teacher who needs our nurturing and instruction.
- We are looking for the curricular and instructional decision points the teacher is making.
- From an accumulation of visits, we consider teacher decision points that might be of value for the teacher to ponder.
- The major purpose of our walk-throughs is to provide opportunities for the teacher's professional growth. Professional growth is considered a process and not some abstract point of finality on a continuum of development.

Thinking back to the start of this chapter and your initial thoughts about walk-throughs and feedback, how has this chapter influenced your thoughts? Discuss your reflections with your learning partner, or think about them yourself and respond in the space provided.

Reflections on the Five-Step  
Walk-Through Observation Structure

(Write your comments here.)

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